ARCHIGRAM

WARREN CHALK
PETER COOK
DENNIS CROMPTON
DAVID GREENE
RON HERRON
MIKE WEBB

ANYTHING-IS-POSSIBLE

1

IT'S ALL THE SAME

"YOU CAN ROLL OUT STEEL - ANY LENGTH
YOU CAN BLOW UP A BALLOON - ANY SIZE
YOU CAN MOULD PLASTIC - ANY SHAPE
BLOKES THAT BUILT THE FORTH BRIDGE
THEY DIDN'T WORRY". *

This breezy approach to architecture and design typifies the anything-is-possible spirit of the six young architects who came together in London in the early 1960s to form Archigram: Warren Chalk, Peter Cook, Dennis Crompton, David Greene, Ron Herron and Mike Webb. Weary of what Peter Cook described as the "continuing European tradition of well-mannered but gutless architecture" and frustrated by the way in which so-called 'modern' architecture seemed to have betrayed the bravest of modernism's philosophies, Archigram set out to stir architecture from its slumbers, inject it with new vitality and dramatically expand its horizons.

Responding to comic books and the Beatles, space travel and moon landings, new technology and science fiction, the group embraced the technological advances of the 1960s and early 1970s with unabashed optimism. Archigram drew inspiration from determined experimenters in the fields of art, architecture and engineering, celebrating and expanding the ideas of such pioneers as Friedrich Kiesler, Barnes Wallis, Buckminster Fuller and Cedric Price. Urging architects to remember that "when you are looking for a solution to what you have been told is an architectural problem - the solution may not be a building", the group broadcast its ideas through its own magazine, teaching, exhibitions, multimedia installations and countless collages and drawings.

STIR ARCHITECTURE FROM IT'S SLUMBERS, INJECT IT WITH NEW VITALITY AND DRAMATICALLY EXPAND ITS HORIZONS

The determination of Chalk, Cook, Crompton, Greene, Herron and Webb that architecture should break out of its narrow-minded, self-referential confines and look beyond ponderous buildings which "just get in the way" has ensured that the noise Archigram made during the 1960s and early 1970s still reverberates today - not just in architectural circles, but in the wider world of popular culture which its members so enthusiastically embraced.

* from a poem by David Greene published in the first issue of Archigram magazine in 1961.

AMAZING ARCHIGRAM

2

MAGAZINE

1961

THE FIRST ISSUE OF ARCHIGRAM MAGAZINE WAS PUBLISHED IN 1961 BY PETER COOK, DAVID GREENE AND MIKE WEBB, SOON AFTER GRADUATION.

THE MAGAZINE WAS INTEGRAL TO THEIR EFFORTS TO "CONTINUE THE POLEMIC AND ENTHUSIASM OF ARCHITECTURE SCHOOL".

A COMBINATION OF THE WORDS "ARCHITECTURE" AND "TELEGRAM," ITS NAME WAS INTENDED TO CONVEY A SENSE OF URGENCY. COOK, GREENE AND WEBB SOUGHT THE COOPERATION OF THREE LONDON COUNTY COUNCIL ARCHITECTS WHOSE WORK THEY ADMIRED: WARREN CHALK, DENNIS CROMPTON, AND RON HERRON.

THE SIX JOINED FORCES, COLLECTIVELY ADOPTING THE NAME ARCHIGRAM.

1970

The multimedia presentation, Arena, introduces the Archigram group and the cultural context in which it evolved. At its centre is the four-screen Archigram Opera, first made in 1972. By then, all nine issues of Archigram magazine had been published and the group's work had been seen all over the world in exhibitions, books, magazines and lectures. Archigram's ideas had been widely absorbed and then imitated, misinterpreted and reviled by other architects. The six members often found themselves travelling to architectural schools and societies around the world heavily laden with boxes of slides.

1972

Feeling the need to distill some of their preoccupations and statements, they embarked on a long discussion about producing an Archigram 'roadshow'. The result was the forty-five minute Opera. As with most Archigram productions – such as competition entries, mock-ups, presentations, models, machines and robots – the Opera was to a large extent the product of Dennis Crompton's facility with micro-switches, carousel slide projectors, dark room apparatus, layers of acetate and rubber grommets.

ARENA

multi media

For Arena, the expanded version of the Opera shown here, the soundtrack and the slides were copied directly from originals used by the group thirty years ago. The video monitors show three films made during the days of Archigram magazine. The film about Archigram was made for television in 1966 by Denis Postle. I Remember Architecture was compiled by David Greene and Mike Myers from a selection of material produced during the early 1970s. The untitled film featuring the Popular Pak with street scenes and robots was made by Archigram and shown in its section of the 1967 Milan Triennale exhibition.

1961

LIVING CITY

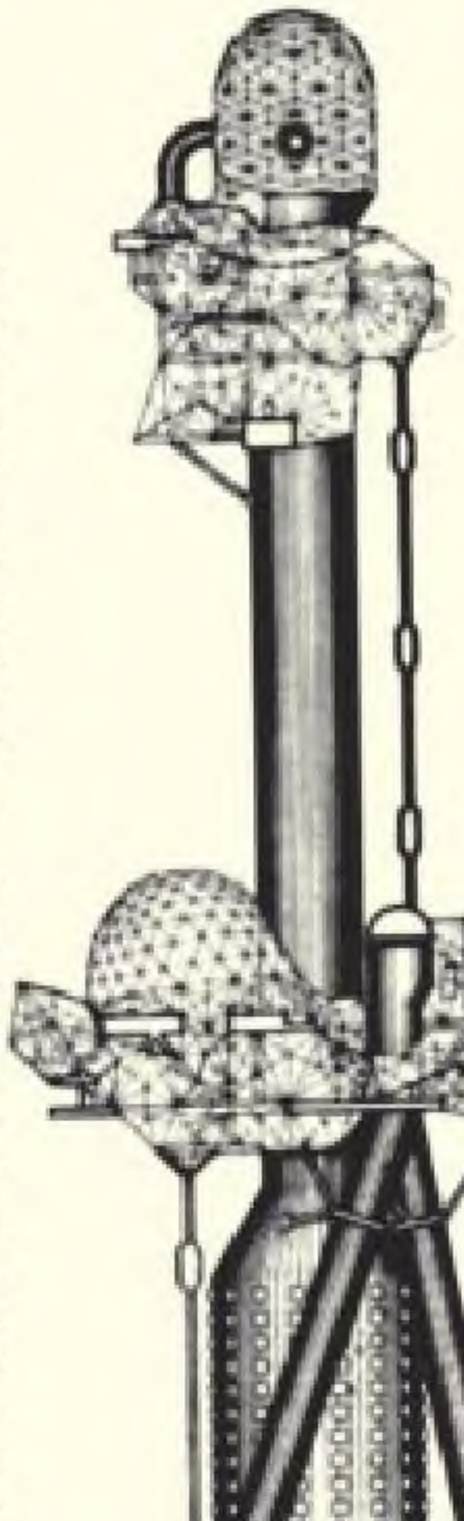
CITY INTERCHANGE AND LIVING CITY

3

MONTREAL TOWER 1963

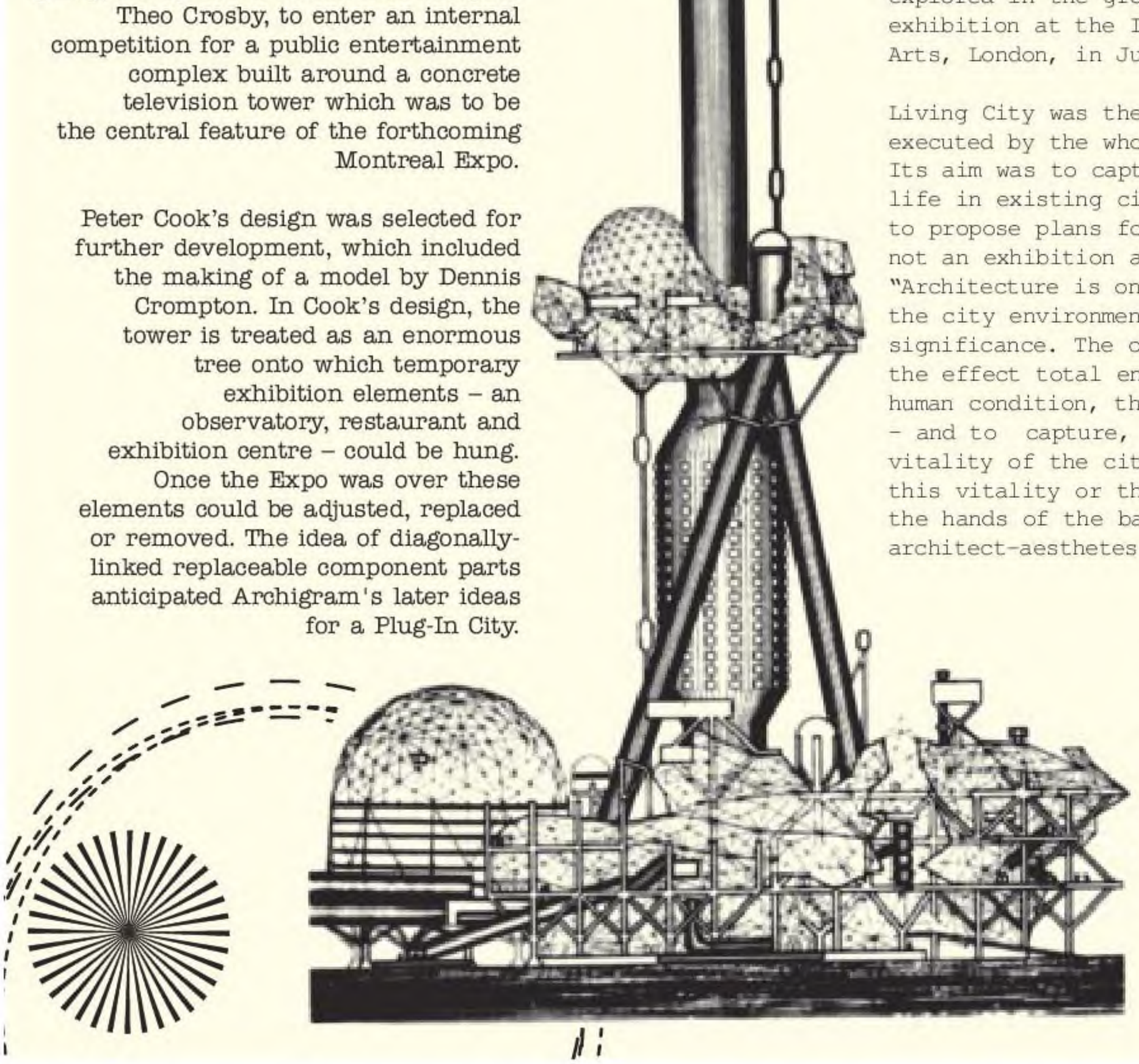
For a brief period in the early 1960s all the members of Archigram were employed by the special Design Group of Taylor Woodrow, the construction company. Taylor Woodrow asked the group, led by the architect and designer Theo Crosby, to enter an internal competition for a public entertainment complex built around a concrete television tower which was to be the central feature of the forthcoming Montreal Expo.

Peter Cook's design was selected for further development, which included the making of a model by Dennis Crompton. In Cook's design, the tower is treated as an enormous tree onto which temporary exhibition elements – an observatory, restaurant and exhibition centre – could be hung. Once the Expo was over these elements could be adjusted, replaced or removed. The idea of diagonally-linked replaceable component parts anticipated Archigram's later ideas for a Plug-In City.



Like a vast hub, Warren Chalk and Ron Herron's 1963 City Interchange is a megastructure consisting of a central node with transportation conduits radiating in every direction, above and below ground. It provides access to rapid transport and communication links with remote population centres and contains facilities for aircraft and hovercraft, with slower methods of transportation such as monorails, buses, cars, and pedestrian tubes operating on the lower levels. The structure itself serves as an information transmitter: its towers are communication and broadcasting beacons as well as facilities for transport control. Resembling a vital organ with a network of arteries, City Interchange expresses Archigram's belief "in the city as a unique organism," an idea more thoroughly explored in the group's Living City exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, in June 1963.

Living City was the first project to be executed by the whole Archigram group. Its aim was to capture and celebrate life in existing cities, rather than to propose plans for new ones. It was not an exhibition about architecture: "Architecture is only a small part of the city environment in terms of real significance. The object was to determine the effect total environment has on the human condition, the responses it generates - and to capture, to express, the vitality of the city. We must perpetuate this vitality or the city will die at the hands of the bad planners and architect-aesthetes."



radiate

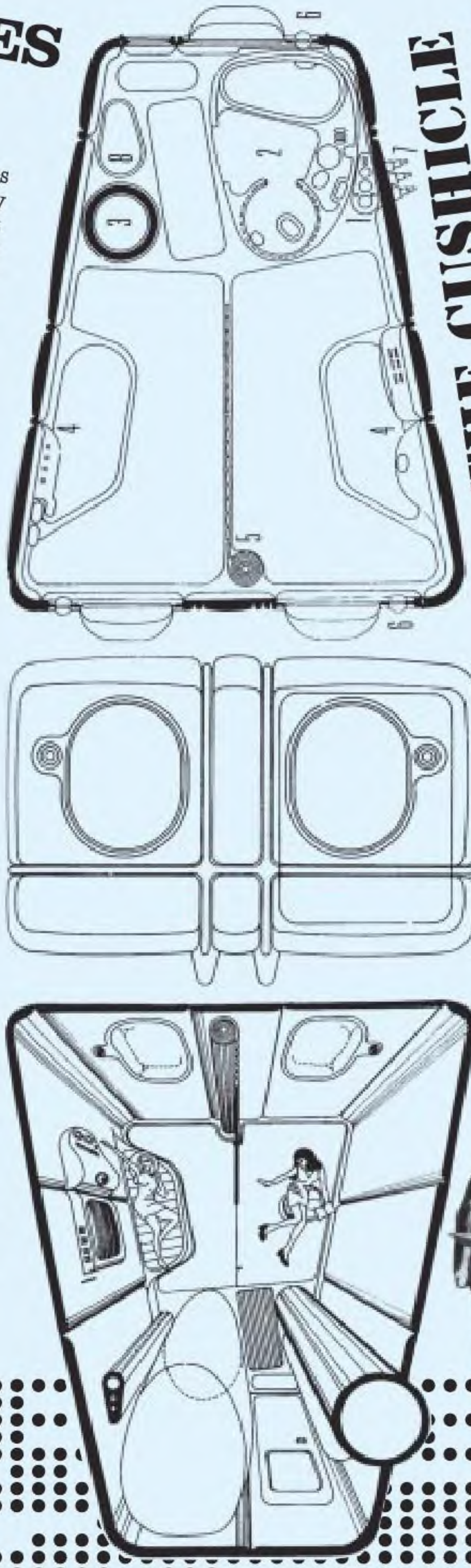
4 CAPSULES & PODS

Warren Chalk developed his Capsule Homes in 1964 in parallel with the Plug-In City project. Two years after the US astronaut John Glenn had completed the first orbit of the earth and with five years to go before the first moon landing, the Capsule Home was inspired by that most advanced form of living container: the space capsule.

The project explores some of Archigram's key principles: mobility, adaptability, and expendability. Each Capsule Home is industrially prefabricated in a space-saving design with fold-away features and a clip-on appliance wall. The components are interchangeable and can be replaced when outdated or as the inhabitant's needs change.

The units can be organised in a cluster: plugging into one another to create a larger structure that can be arranged horizontally or vertically to form a Capsule Homes Tower.

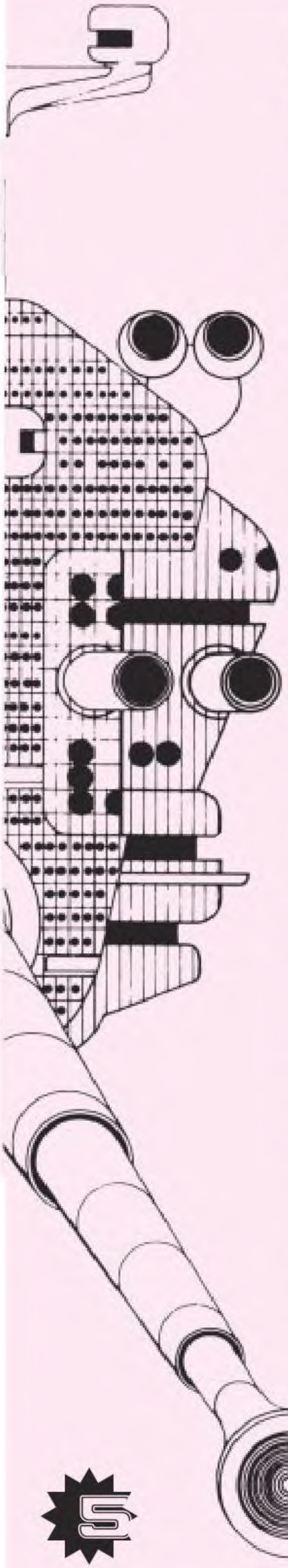
David Greene's variation on the idea of a Capsule Home is the 1966 Living Pod, a sophisticated take on the trailer home with inflatable seats and partitions, mobile work and eating stations and a range of machines to maximise autonomy and convenience. These includedispensers and silos for disposable items, climate control apparatus and "automatic body-cleaning equipment". The Living Pod can be suspended within a Plug-In urban structure or can sit in open landscape. Thanks to its adjustable legs, the Pod can be sited on a forty degree slope or in up to five feet of water.



THE CUSHICLE AND THE SUITALOON

While Ron Herron's earlier Walking City addresses mobile architecture on a grand scale, Mike Webb's 1966 Cushicle provides for the needs of individual wanderers by enabling them to carry a complete environment on their backs. Conceived as a nomadic unit, the Cushicle inflates when needed and is fully serviced, carrying food, water, radio, miniature projection television and heating apparatus. The radio and television are contained inside the helmet and the food and water supply carried in pod attachments. Webb envisaged that, with the provision of service nodes and additional apparatus, the autonomous Cushicle could become part of a larger urban system of personalised enclosures.

In 1967, Webb took the idea a step further, designing an inflatable suit as a complementary component of the Cushicle. The Suitaloon provides a living envelope whenever and wherever desired. It fits the body closely and, when combined with a Cushicle, provides all necessary services. "EACH SUIT HAS A PLUG SERVING A SIMILAR FUNCTION TO THE KEY TO YOUR FRONT DOOR," wrote Webb. "YOU CAN PLUG INTO YOUR FRIEND AND YOU WILL BOTH BE IN ONE ENVELOPE, OR YOU CAN PLUG INTO ANY ENVELOPE, STEPPING OUT OF YOUR SUIT WHICH IS LEFT CLIPPED ON TO THE OUTSIDE READY TO STEP INTO WHEN YOU LEAVE. THE PLUG ALSO SERVES AS A MEANS OF CONNECTING ENVELOPES TOGETHER TO FORM LARGER SPACES. VARIOUS MODELS OF CUSHICLE ENVELOPE AND SUIT WOULD OF COURSE BE AVAIL-ABLE, RANGING FROM SUPER SPORTS TO FAMILY MODELS."
"IF IT WASN'T FOR MY SUITALOON I WOULD HAVE TO BUY A HOUSE."

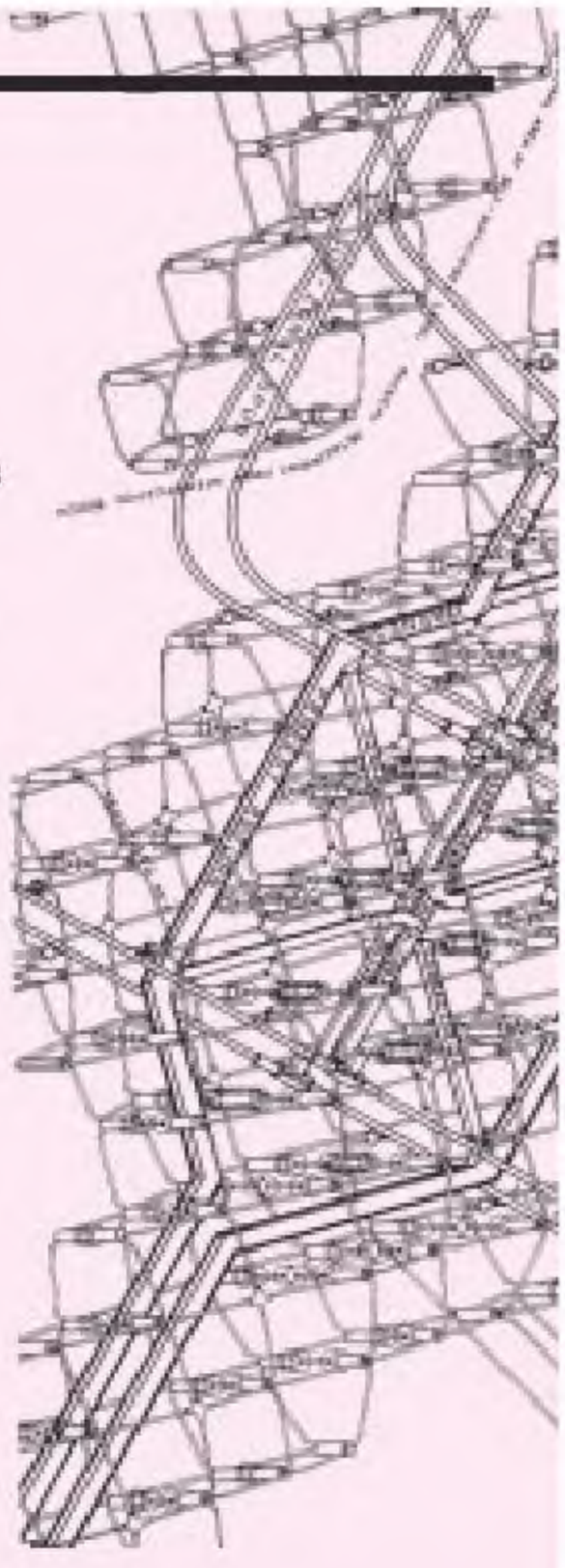


PLUG-IN CITY → PLUG-IN UNIVERSITY → WALKING CITY →→→→→→→

Increasingly interested in the idea of expendable architecture, Archigram began to speculate about new urban environments which could be programmed and structured to facilitate change. Plug-in City was a collection of different proposals developed by Warren Chalk, Peter Cook and Dennis Crompton. It was designed for obsolescence. Even its main 'frame' – a multilayered network of tubes carrying essential services and means of transport – was intended to last no longer than forty years, while individual housing units, live-work spaces, plug-in shops and rentable offices were to be updated more frequently. Cranes operating from a railway at the apex of the structure would move different units in and out of position.

The Plug-in University, developed by Peter Cook in 1963 with a group of students analysing the future of universities, was a more specific exploration of the Plug-in concept. Each student is allocated a standard metal box that can be located anywhere on the tension skin-covered decks which form the University's campus. The campus thus becomes a nomadic plain with students moving their boxes from place to place.

Archigram's interest in nomadism took several giant steps further with Ron Herron's 1964 Walking City. Herron envisaged whole cities gliding across the landscape, pausing to plug into utilities and information networks at chosen locations. Walking City could be seen as a frightening expression of what David Greene called the "current cultural condition of restlessness" or as an eager anticipation of a mobile world with a global information network in which political boundaries and cultural differences would melt away.



LOGPLUGS→ ROKPLUGS → ROBOTS→ MOWBOTS→ THE BOTTERY →→→→→→

"Doing your own thing is important.

Unfortunately, however, in terms of doing your own thing, architecture is clearly not working", wrote David Greene in his Gardener's Notebook published in a 1969 issue of Architectural Design. To help alleviate the problem Greene devised the Logplug. It could provide all the utilities and communication links a modern traveller out exploring the wilderness might require, while leaving the beauty and serenity of the natural surroundings undisturbed.

Discreetly installed all across the world, Logplugs could be located by the traveller using a mobile dashboard and homing device. Having plugged into the log and selected the required services, the traveller would pay for them using an attached credit card machine. "The whole of London or New York will be available in the world's leafy hollows, deserts and flowered meadows". Greene speculated that eventually it would be possible to create "a fully serviced natural landscape", or Bottery, in which the natural world looks just as it should but is serviced by Unseen Networks, otherwise known as L.A.W.U.N. – Locally Available World Unseen Networks.

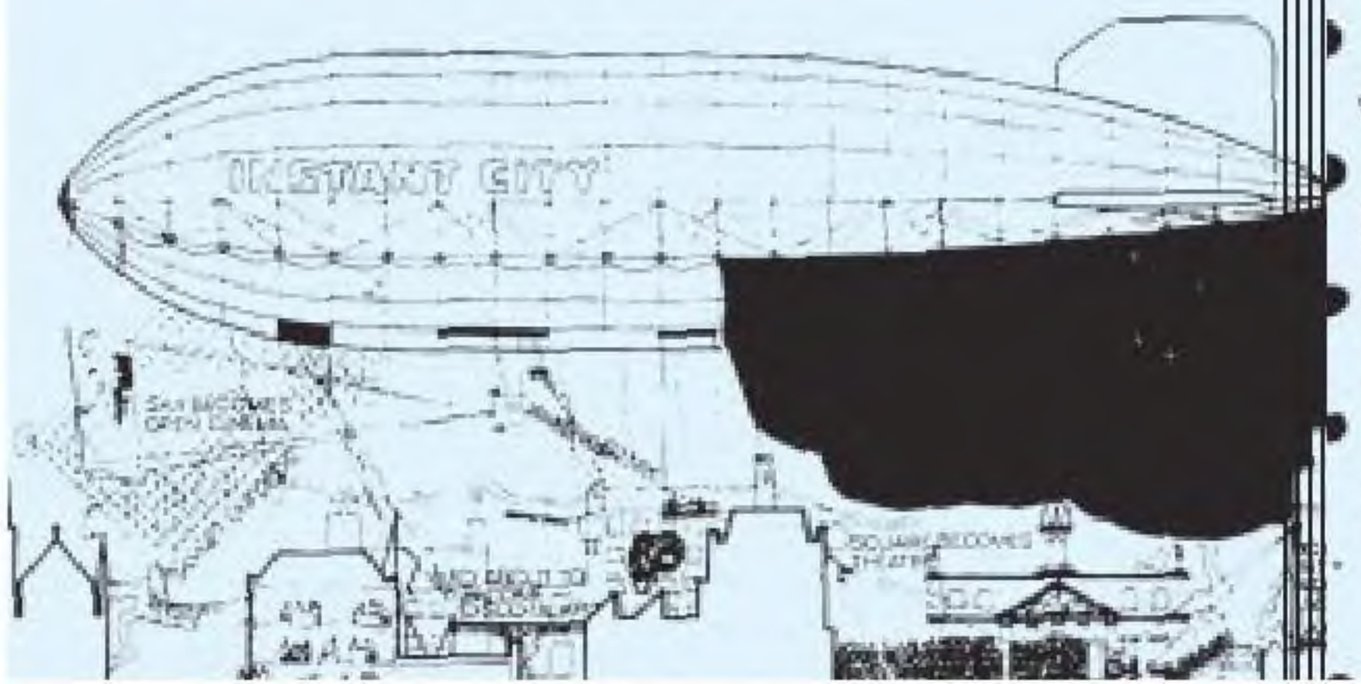
"Every House now contains crude robots everybody wants a house full of robots but no one wants it to look like a house full of robots –so why not forget about the house altogether and just have a garden and a collection of robots" As well as a Logplug – or, if the landscape dictated, a Rokplug - your garden (your L.A.W.U.N.) might need a Mowbot: "No sweat, set the grass cutting height on the dial and it will sense when the grass is needing a trim … it's invisible, it's not a piece of permanent lawn furniture".

6

IDEAS CIRCUS AND INSTANT CITY

Anticipating a future in which education would be dependent on access to technology and on interconnectivity between learning resources, Peter Cook conceived his Ideas Circus in 1967 as a means of sharing and exchanging information among distant groups of people. As the Circus – a kind of travelling university campus – moves from town to town it plugs into a technology network which will remain in place after the Circus has moved on. Whenever a new host or member plugs in, the communication and information network expands organically.

Archigram invented another peripatetic super-structure in Instant City, designed by Peter Cook, Dennis Crompton and Ron Herron in 1968. Transported by airships and trucks, Instant City can be unfolded and quickly erected to form a sprawling entertainment complex bringing news, events and a taste of urban life to remote areas. The result of a grant awarded to Archigram by Chicago's Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Arts in 1968, Instant City sought to reconcile the conflicting desires: to travel and to stay put; to live in the city and to live in the country; to experience change and to preserve tradition.



FEATURES: MONTE CARLO

In 1969, Archigram was one of eleven invited practices involved in the Monte-Carlo competition to design an entertainment complex on a reclaimed stretch of Monaco's shoreline. Peter Cook, Dennis Crompton and Ron Herron thrashed out their entry with the help of Colin Fournier and the engineer Frank Newby in a room on the top floor of the Architectural Association in London, which they had borrowed for the summer.

While rival proposals disrupted the shoreline with multiple structures, Archigram's design enhanced the natural beauty of the coast by burying the architecture beneath the earth and simultaneously creating a park above ground. The hidden underground chamber – which Newby succeeded in persuading the group should be circular rather than rectangular for greater structural efficiency – was designed to accommodate a wide variety of events, from sports competitions to banquets to art exhibitions, in a space adaptable to any situation. Features: Monte-Carlo was to provide state-of-the-art multimedia technology, modular furniture, mobile facilities, plug-in accessories, and robotic servicing systems. Aside from the chamber itself, there was no architecture - just an infinitely adaptable kit of parts.

Archigram's winning entry, consisting of 57 sheets of drawings demonstrating six typical but very different ways in which the space could be used, was eventually abandoned following a change of government in Monaco in 1974.

After Archigram

After the last issue of the magazine, the group continued to work under the name Archigram until the mid 1970s, completing such projects as an adventure playground for Milton Keynes and a swimming pool for the pop singer Rod Stewart. Archigram members always worked individually as well as on occasional group projects. There was only a short period – two years between 1962 and 1964 – when all its members were in the same place at the same time. By 1976 they had disbanded Archigram, but remained close friends.

Warren Chalk continued to write and teach in North America as well as the UK, principally at the Architectural Association, London. He died in 1987.

Peter Cook is currently Bartlett Professor of Architecture at University College London. In partnership with Colin Fournier, he recently completed the Kunsthaus in Graz, Austria. He will be the curator of the British Pavilion at the Venice International Biennale of Architecture, 2004.

Having worked for many years at the Architectural Association, where, in addition to teaching, he was responsible for the school's many publications, **Dennis Crompton** now tutors the Masters programme at the Bartlett School of Architecture, University College, London. He continues to design books and exhibitions.

David Greene is Professor of Architecture at the University of Westminster, London. He continues to write and to develop collaborative theoretical projects under the name Casa Verde.

Ron Herron taught at the Architectural Association from 1965 to 1993. In 1981, with his sons Andrew and Simon, he formed Herron Associates, designing the headquarters of Imagination on Store Street, London. In 1993 he became Professor and Head of the School of Architecture at the University of East London. Ron Herron died in 1994.

Mike Webb has lived for many years in New York. He has taught at Cooper Union, Columbia, Barnard and Princeton Universities and has exhibited his work widely, both in the US and in Europe.